

200 EMILE ZOLA, NOVELIST AND
REFORMER

My-Boots who reigns as King over a
Belleville of brawlers and
toss-pots."¹

The foregoing extracts will give some idea of
the passionate vigour which Zola occasionally displayed in
controversy.

To some readers it may seem beside the mark
to dwell at
length upon a series of newspaper articles like "
Une Cam-
pagne," but it is in such writings, more than in
the majority
of his novels, that one finds the real Zola with
his superb
confidence in himself, his disregard for
conventionalities,

and his glowing passion for truth and
rectitude. His pen
was certainly not always so virulent as in the
passages one
has quoted, but it was almost invariably
incisive, and when
treating sociological subjects it showed that,
however im-
personal his novels might be, his heart really
bled at the
thought of the degradation he described in
them. Looking

back, it seems extraordinary that for so many
years his
critics, and particularly foreign ones, and
among them nota-
bly those of England and America, should
have persisted
in the ridiculous assertion that if he pictured
filth, it was
solely in order to pander to readers of gross
instincts.

His articles, his declarations, his
explanations, were all
before the world, and easily accessible; but
through care-
lessness, or laziness, or ignorance, the great

majority of
English and American critics never turned to
them, and
the legend of the filthy Zola, whose favourite
habitat was
the muck heap or the cesspool, spread upon
all sides.

The humanitarian purpose, the reforming
instinct that
is to be found in Zola, appears clearly in
some of the

¹ "Une Campagne." Abbreviated from the article
entitled "Esclaves
lyres," p. 362 *et seq.* Headers of "L'Assommoir " will
remember that the
bibulous " My-Boots," referred to above, is one of its
principal characters.